

August 13, 2009 - Murtha Reaches Out by Phone

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BY ARLENE JOHNS

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Sen. Arlen Specter again faced angry voters Wednesday during a town hall meeting in State College. Meanwhile, Rep. John Murtha, D-Johnstown, is addressing health-care reform concerns through a series of telephone town hall meetings.

Murtha spokesman Matthew Mazonkey said there have been two such events and a third is planned for early next month with residents of Cambria, Somerset and Fayette counties.

"They have been a successful way to engage thousands of constituents on a wide range of topics and issues from the convenience of their own home," he said.

Mazonkey said the first two events involved thousands of voters from outlying counties also served by Murtha.

"We have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from these town halls, and we have more planned for the months ahead," Mazonkey said.

"In addition, Congressman Murtha has a full schedule of events throughout the

district this month meeting constituents and discussing the issues they care about.”

G. Terry Madonna, director of the Center for Politics and Public Affairs at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, said he thinks meetings on health-care reform are crucial for lawmakers.

“No member of Congress can avoid going into their district and talking with (voters) about this issue,” Madonna said.

“The last thing they want to do is be accused of ducking on what is arguably one of the most important issues of our lifetime.”

He said he has heard of several lawmakers holding telephone events and the reasons behind the decision.

“But I think on this subject they are better served by going and facing their constituents directly,” Madonna said.

Specter, whose meetings have been disrupted by catcalls, jeers and shouting, appeared Wednesday on CBS’ “The Early Show.”

He said he believes the protesters are “not necessarily representative of America” but that he was “impressed with the fact that people have been very well prepared.”

“These people have a right to be organized,” Specter said on the program. “I’m not going to complain about being organized.”

“They have a right to speak.”

“But I think we have to explain, they’re not necessarily representative of America,” he said. “I think they’re vocal. I don’t think they’re representative.”

Rob Gleason, chairman of the state Republican Party, called Specter’s comments amazing.

“Senator Specter is certainly wearing his Democratic stripes,” he said. “If the Democrats allow full debate of this issue and take the necessary time for their members to read this awful piece of legislation, they will find that the

president's plan would devastate our country. With a price tag that is measured in the trillions, this awful plan would take away the right to choose your doctor, allow the government to ration your health care and cause long delays or denial of your medical treatment.

Madonna said the issue is one that touches everyone deeply.

"This is an administration that's trying to make huge changes in American life," he said. "Voters are deeply divided about this." As they were about the election.